

**Testimony of Sarah Lombardo
before the Appropriations Committee
Regarding An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations
March 6, 2015**

Good evening, Senator Bye and Representative Walker and members of the committee. My name is Sarah Lombardo and I am a registered voter in the town of Stonington. I am testifying in regard to the Governor's Budget Recommendations. I am opposed to the proposed cuts to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. These cuts will defund the Regional Mental Health Boards (RMHB), which serves my town. These boards help leverage \$23 million in federal funding. The RMHB and Regional Action Council collect the regional information and develop priorities required by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services plan. RMHB form community partnerships to help fund solutions to multiple issues such as young adult needs, transportation, wellness, and health equity. In addition, they assess the adult behavioral health service programs, evaluating them and providing oversight.

One of the boards, the Eastern Regional Mental Health Board oversees the agency where I work, Reliance House. I was first hired at Reliance House back in 2009 and since then I have seen the agency grow with the oversight of the ERMHB. Reliance House provides members a place to go to shelter from the storm of life. It gives people support for members going back to school who have challenges. Members have an advocate for talking to teachers at the local community college when the need arises to arrange for services. Reliance House provides homeless members with opportunities to have better living arrangements. It provides several residencies where members learn to life skills and how live with others in a safe environment. I have worked in several of the group homes and seen members grow in their recovery.

Now I work at Teamworks, the Reliance House clubhouse, where we have groups, outings, and guest speakers. I have seen members come in and be very anxious, but then after awhile they start to make friends and become relaxed. It's amazing to see the members reach out to each other whether it is in group or at an outing. It is a wonderful privilege to be able to foster that environment, seeing recovery in action.

Team building has extended itself off the property and onto a sailboat. We had several sailboat ride opportunities where members became the crew. They learned about sailboat operation skills as well as what is necessary when working as a unit. Again, this was a powerful experience for members and staff.

Without the ERMHB, my agency would not have the voice that it does and support that we get to bring opportunities for good to our members. Please continue to fund the 5 Eastern Regional Mental Health Boards, preserving the Citizen's Voice in Mental Health Policy and other DMHAS funded programs like Reliance House. These programs are greatly needed.